DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 464 PS 022 151

AUTHOR	Ekstrand, Gudrun
TITLE	God and the Trolls: Socialization of Lappish Children in Northern Sweden. Reprints and Miniprints from Department of Educational and Psychological Research. No. 781.
INSTITUTION	Lund Univ. (Sweden). Malmo School of Education.
REPORT NO	ISSN-1100-3391
PUB DATE	Jun 93
NOTE	13p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; Child Rearing; Children; Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Traits; Foreign Countries; Minority Groups; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Child Relationship; *Parents as Teachers; Resistance to Change; *Social Attitudes; *Socialization; *Traditionalism
IDENTIFIERS	India; *Lapps; *Sweden

ABSTRACT

This report notes that two cultures may view similar childhood behaviors differently, and cites results of studies that compared Swedish and Indian parents' attitudes toward children to support this statement. The report describes a study that examined parental attitudes and behaviors among Lappish families in Northern Sweden, in which data was obtained from interviews with parents and children and videotapes of family interactions. Subjects of the study were traditional Lappish villagers who still rely on reindeer herding, fishing, and other traditional occupations to earn a living, and have little contact with the Swedish government or welfare system. Essentially, Lappish parents believe that children should be raised as they have always been, that children should "do the right thing," and that children should have the common sense to know what the right thing is. Lappish children are trained to make their own decisions and take responsibility for the consequences, and are expected to follow traditional occupations. They are taught through traditional stories and learn that, through obedience to rules that enable them to function safely in the harsh traditional herder life, they can, ultimately, achieve personal freedom. (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PS

reprints and miniprints
from
Department of Educational and Psychological Research
Malmö School of Education - University of Lund
No. 781

ED 366 464

GOD AND THE TROLLS

Socialization of Lappish children in Northern Sweden

Gudrun Ekstrand

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
A. Bjerstedt
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

June 1993

PS 022151

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

GOD AND THE TROLLS

Socialization of Lappish children in Northern Sweden

Gudrun Ekstrand

Ekstrand, G. God and the Trolls: Socialization of Lappish children in Northern Sweden. *Reprints and Miniprints* (Malmö, Sweden: School of Education), No. 781, 1993.

Lappish parents have been interviewed about their norm and value systems and their expectations for their children's future. Lappish existential attitudes have been explored.

Keywords: Child rearing, cross-cultural psychology, family, parents' expectations, socialization, Sweden.

God and the Trolls

Socialization of Lappish children in Northern Sweden

Gudrun Ekstrand

How to describe a culture

It is very tempting to try to describe a culture or features of a culture from a special point of view to a listener or a reader who has never visited the culture. The goal is to give them an opportunity to learn about something they have never seen. However, I believe the task is impossible. The only way of making culture visible is to use some kind of comparative strategy that focuses the culture through contrast.

As a cross-cultural scientist I have learned not to trust my ability to make people understand phenomena from other cultures. It is difficult to describe specific cultural phenomena to an audience that has never had experience of the culture. The obstacles are of two kind; semantic and the value system in the reader´s own culture. I will give examples.

A specific behavior conducted in two different cultures may mean very different things. The behavior will be interpreted in terms of the surrounding culture and its beliefs. The interpretation of every behavior depends on each individual cultural setting and background. The behaviors may look alike, e.g. some children are playing around, cheerfully shouting and chasing each other. The behavior is expressed the same way in English. It may be translated from one language to another and back again. However the words may convey quite different messages. The behavior may be valued entirely in an opposite way in two different cultures.

BEHAVIOR

Children are:
- playing around
- cheerfully shouting
- chasing each other

INTERPRETATION/ VALUED IN TWO CULTURES

Sweden	**India**
Happy children	Undisciplined
Emotionally safe	Noisy children
Expressing a joy for life	Bad manners

PARENTS RESPONSE

Smiling at the child	Correcting the child
A feeling of being a success as a parent	A feeling of beeing a failure

These differences in valuing behavior described in the same words in different cultures make it necessary to use *semantic analysis* as well as analysis of *the meaning of a behavior* as I have understood it from a native point of view.

The word Harmony is an example of how words have different connotations in different parts of the world. During my data collecting time in India, I used the word as I understood it. In Sweden parents very often wish their children to be harmonious. Not a single parent in India talked about harmonius children when answering my questions. At first I came to the conclusion that harmonious children are important for the Swedish parents but not for the Indian parents. But that is not so. During the second period of data collection in India I put some straight questions to the Indian parents about how they valued harmonious children. My question confused them. They assured me that all their children were harmonious. "How can you tell" I asked? "We ask them," the parents said. This explanation confused me. I had to look for *the meaning of* the word harmonious in Sweden and in India in order to understand what the parents told me in the interviews.

PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS ON CHILDREN TO BE HARMONIOUS

Sweden **An individual state**	**India** **A collective state**
The child should feel happy, safe, selfcontent, in spite of the circumstances, or external factors such as broken homes etc.	A child should live in an affectionate social condition towards every living being, including Nature. To adjust and to sacrifice.

It is often the case that a researcher has to find a way of comparing cultures that are not comparable. For 10 years I studied the socialization process, norm and value systems in India and Sweden. The big contrast between the countries made my own culture visible to me "from the outside", and helped me to see many things "from the inside" in India. In that work I needed some other viewpoints from which I was able to scrutinize my own interpretations. For that reason I included Lapps and a religious minority group in the north of Sweden in the investigation. The Lapps reacted to my statements concerning the Swedish way of life, and they told me about their own goals and expectations.

When telling you about the socialization of Lappish children, I will use words such as authority, obedience, independence and individual freedom in a combination that is very difficult to understand for a Swedish reader. In Sweden the words obedience and independence can hardly be combined in any socialization process.

About the Lapps

Only a small number of the Lapps live by reindeer herding. Less than 20% have their main income from the reindeer. Most of the Lapps are integrated in Swedish society and support themselves with the same occupations as other Swedes do. When in this paper I talk about the Lapps, and Lappish children, I refer to the group of reindeer-herding Lapps.

As a Lapp you still live according to old traditions though some aspects of life are becoming easier. Snow scooters, helicopters and even motor bikes have changed the conditions for work in the mountains. Life has to be adjusted to the demands of Nature in order to survive. A Lapp who is talking about his life will tell you about Nature.

The Lappish informants for my study are all reindeer-herding, i.e. semi-nomadic. They live in towns during the winter season. In the early spring, before the snow melts and when the lakes and rivers are still frozen they follow the herd to the mountains and move to their summer villages. In the autumn they move back. Nowadays they follow the reindeer by snow scooter, aeroplane or helicopter.

Methods

The investigation is based on data from India and Sweden. In Sweden families from reindeer-herding Lapps have also been studied. They were introduced into the bigger investigation to give further contrast to the results.

All families come from Lappish villages in the very north of Sweden, in the mountains, close to the border to Norway.

The primary method of data collection has been the interview. In order to fulfil the desire for a broad scope of information, a specific type, the extended interview, has been developed. The method has been described elsewere (Ekstrand, 1990a), but I will give a brief description of the extended interview. In an extended interview the whole family often answers the interview questions at the same time. Then the family members can help with information, they are able to correct themselves and discuss the questions and answers among themselves. Often the individual family members see things from different perspectives. That may be a starting point for discussions in the family. Such discussions are very informative. The extended interview is a combination of many methods. Observations, video taping and photo documentation of specific situations take place during the interview. The aim is to document a whole cultural event. All extended interviews are performed in a dialogue form where the important principle to follow is to understand the meaning of questions and answers. This understanding is a prerequisite for the basis of the interpretation of meaning.

Interviews and interpretations

Let me quote from an interview with Johan, a Lappish father of nine children. I was talking to him while he was preparing fish for salting in a bucket. We were sitting on the shore of a cold fjeld-tarn. He worked rapidly and effectively with his pretty Lappish boneknife while he answered my questions;

- What is a good child?
- *Children should be like we always have been.*
- And how is that?
- *They should do the right thing.*
- What is right?
- *Everybody must have that much common sense to know what is right.*

This little conversation tells us a lot about how the Lapps look upon life and how to raise children.

Children should be like we always have been. Children are raised to become Lapps. Everything has to be the same way it has always been because you have to follow the traditions and learn how to survive as a reindeer-herding Lapp.

Some changes have taken place. The mechanisation of the reindeer herding is looked upon with mixed feelings. In one way life is easier even if the body hurts after travel by motor bike or snow scooter. But the old generation of Lapps complain. " Children are becoming lazy. They do not bother to walk or run on skis!" -"They say we are saving time by using machines. What are we going to do with all that time?"

The Lapps warn against trusting machines in the mountains. A Lappish child has to train himself to walk and ski. The training starts when the child is 2 - 3 years old. The family take their children on tours higher up in the mountains, to the reindeer. They walk as far as the child can manage and when the child is tired they rest, or even let the child sleep a little while before they all start walking again. If the weather changes or if they are in a big hurry for some reason, the father may put the little child in his rucksack and carry him.

The aims of this training are manifold; a) give the child knowledge of how to transport oneself in the mountains and let the child experience how to face all situations that may arise, b) give the child opportunity to find the limits of his own capability. The utmost goal is to give the child ability to control all situations caused by Nature. That will help him to survive as a Lapp and give him freedom. The forces of Nature to be mastered are of two kind, the external forces like weather, snow, temperature, distance, the reindeer, as well as internal: the limits of the body, power of endurance, courage to take responsibility for oneself.

To do the right thing. The sentence "To do the right thing", should be given more than one meaning. There is the moral meaning, to do what God expects from you. Religion has a very strong impact upon the Lappish people. In olden days, and even today some work is not allowed to be done on Sundays. You may not catch fish, nor collect wood for the fires.
The other meaning of the sentence is; "There is a right way of doing things and you have to find it out". Small children are expected to listen to elderly people and to obey them whenever they give advice. There are rules for a Lapp to follow. Nature is merciless and doesn´t leave any room for mistakes. That´s why the Lapp family is an authoritarian system which socializes their children to autonomy and independence. The Lappish word is freedom.

Freedom is demanding. During my stay in the villages I listened to many stories about Lapp heroes. There was the woman who told me she has always taken care of her childbirths without any help. An other woman was early left a widow with five small children. She managed to take care of the situation by herself. "The strap to the ackja (Lapplanders sledge) never left her hand". There was also the old and poor Lapp who lived alone in a Lapp-cot of peat far from other people. The authorities sent him a request for paying his taxes according to a standard for one person household. He refused to do so telling the authorities that he never had any money. "Everybody needs money for buying food, for toiletpaper, newspapers and for tickets to the cinema. It is Swedish standard," the tax authority-man claimed. "There is no shop in the mountain where I can buy food. I have fish in the fjeld-tarn, berries in the forrest, and meat from my reindeer. I pay no electricity bill, no postman comes with any post or newspaper. The distance to the nearest cinema is about 200 km over the mountain. I need no money," the Lapp said. The authorities had to accept that Lapps cannot be measured according to Swedish standard.

To do the right thing is to take care of yourself and not to depend on anybody. Lapps very seldom ask for help from the Swedish social welfare office. They take a pride in getting through all difficulties single-handed.

Everybody must have that much common sense to know what is right. A Lapp is raised to use his common sense. If you are cold, put something on. If you are tired, go to sleep. If you are hungry, find something to eat. If you have a long distance to go, then rest. Nobody else but yourself can tell you what to do. You don't structure your day by the clock, or the year by the agenda. You follow the herd and you use your sense. It is not necessary to follow regular habits and norms created by the authorities. To obey external rules or decrees creates individuals dependent on others. The worst of all is to lose freedom and become an uniform standard-man. "We are all individualists. Before us they were individualists all their lifetime." - "If you meet one Swede, you have seen them all. They are all cast in the same mould." - "Among us there are many odd characters. We allow freedom to create our own future, our own personality."

The Lapps very often use the word freedom when they talk about goals for socialization. Freedom is not a term opposite to the word obedience. In an interview with Isac, a young Lapp around 23 years old, and his uncle Nicko I realized how obedience could function as a step towards freedom. I talked to Isac about his future expectations. He told me he looked upon his uncle as a hero. Isac was very proud of having Nicko for an uncle. Nicko could take all reindeer over the mountain in any weather and follow the wind. "My uncle is the best lead-man in our village" Isac claimed. "He

will never get lost, even if it is dark or foggy. He brings the reindeer over the mountains from Norway to Sweden. He follows the wind." As Nicko was present I asked him if Isac told me the truth. "Yes," he said. "How do you do when you follow the wind?" I asked. Nicko had difficulties finding the right words. He hesitated and then he told me about that half-tamed "laidestanhärki", the male reindeer leader of the herd. Nicko walks or skies first with the "laidestanhärki" in a leash. The herd then follows them.

- "I understand that part of the story. But I do not understand how you know the direction only by following the wind?"

-"Well, that is not so very difficult," Nicko said. "If the wind is blowing from the north, and I want to go to the north, then I must have the wind straight in my face. If I feel the wind on my cheek, then I have turned to the wrong direction."

- "I still don´t understand Nicko. How do you know if the wind is blowing from the north in the first place?"

- "I know," he said.

Nicko knew, but he couldn´t explain how he knew. Nicko was educated by his uncles when he was a little boy. He was not allowed to bring the reindeer across the mountains by himself before the age of 17 years. The older Lapps told him the day he had the power. After that day he had his freedom.

I asked Nicko about his feelings when he was alone with the herd in the mountains. "Are you afraid? Do you feel lonely? Do you doubt your ability to do the work?" Nicko said "No". His nephew Isac had never made the trip alone. The older Lapps don´t give him that freedom.

The children are trained to make their own decisions and to take the consequenses. When childen are very small the Lapp parents give them rules to follow. These rules are often hidden in stories or tales. The stories are told by the elderly Lapps to the children. One story tells about the big Sea snake that lives in the deep and very cold fjeld-tarn. When the Sea snake finds a child alone on the shore, he may come up from the depth and swallow that child. Another story tells about what may happen if a little child puts a wooden stick in the fire inside the Lapp-cot. The stick will glow, and small firesparks will get loose. If they do they will find the reindeer and make them all blind. One story advises every little child to keep a little bell in their belt. When moving outside the village the bell must be jingling to keep the Mountain witch away. In every waterfall, the big one as well as the small cascades, a very evil old man lives. He will not hesitate to catch any child foolish enough to come too close. The unfortunate child will be taken to the realm of the Waterfall man and he will never see his parents again. The function of all these stories is to protect children from risks in the environment. The parents are not able to watch over them every moment and there is no way of making the environment safe for the Lappish children.

The little child is too inexperienced to have a mature judgement every time he has to come to a decision. Therefore the Lapp parents confirm or reject the decisions and their words are final. In a democratic society the ideal is to have discussions between persons, compromises and joint decisions. A very important aim for the Swedish parents is to make even very small children understand why things have to be handled in one way or an other. The Lappish parents do not discuss with their children or compromise on issues concerning the ability to live in the mountains. If the child wants to follow the father up to the reindeer, the father may say Yes or No. Yes, you are able to walk that long, Yes, the weather is fine, Yes, you are old enough. No, it is too long a distance, No, there is going to be bad weather, No, you will not manage, you are too young. The conditions under which the Lapps live create an authoritarian system regarding the old and young generation.

Discussion

The ability to survive as a Lapp in a majority society depends upon what rights the society gives them to follow their own traditions. Without permission to give priority to the laws of Nature, before following bureaucratic decisions, the reindeerherding Lapps can not continue as a semi-nomadic group. "The authorities often tell us to handle the reindeer according to their rules. They believe the reindeer are like dogs, that they can be transferred by leash. The reindeer are the wild animal of the forest."

The very existence of a Lappish population is also due to the socialization of the new generation of Lapp children. They need to know about the life of a reindeer herder. They must be given the opportunity to be educated to the task from the older generation of Lapps. An education to become a Lapp starts from the very beginning of the life of the child. Will the next generation be able to live according to the demands of Nature. Will anybody in the future be capable of following the wind?

The Lapps are anxious about their future. A menace to the Lapp culture is pollution. The reindeer will eat polluted lichen which affects the meat and makes it unfit for food. The fish in the fjeld-tarn, the berries and even the beasts of prey are part of life.

It is important to discuss how individuals are socialized into a culture as individuals, group members and members of society. There is a different stress on each level in different cultures. In India the stress is on the group level. To become a good member of the society, to do ones duty for the family, to be loyal and to adjust are important goals for socialization. In Sweden the goal is individualistic. Independence and its synonyms self-reliance, self-supportiveness, autonomy are often mentioned as goals for socialization. The Lapps do not consider the Swedes to be independent. Swedes, the Lapps say, are dependent on being like everyone else, they are afraid to expose their individualism, and they are highly dependent on

societal authorities and services. The Lapps strive to reach freedom. To be free from obstacles that prevent the Lapp from following the herd and the wind is the goal for Lappish socialization.

REFERENCES

Ekstrand, G. (1987). Gud och Tro"en: Intervjuer med samiska och laestadianska föräldrar om barn. /God and the Trolls: Interviews with Lappish and Laestadian parents about children./ *Pedagogisk dokumentation* (Malmö, Sweden: School of Education - University of Lund), No. 87.

Ekstrand, G. (1990a). *Kulturens barn*. /Children of Culture./ Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.

Ekstrand, G. (1990b). Children of Culture. *Reprints and Miniprints*. (Malmö, Sweden: School of Education - University of Lund), No. 701.

ISSN 1100-3391